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ABSTRACT

The role of the assistant principal is an excellent educational resource and should be enhanced to allow assistant principals a more vital role in instructional leadership. This document lists functions related to the assigned, expected, and assumed responsibilities of the assistant principal that would enhance his/her role and involvement, as well as situational influences that should be considered when that role is defined. Separate lists of suggestions for improving the assistant principal's relationship with the District Office, the principal, the faculty, the students, parents, and professional organizations are given, and the organizational structure of the assistant principalship is outlined. Also provided are recommendations in the areas of role enhancement, evaluation, supervision, and professional development aimed at improving the performance and satisfaction of assistant principals and increasing their suitability for advanced administrative posts. Recommendations to school boards, superintendent and central office administrators, principals, teachers, parents, patrons, and assistant principals regarding the reassessment and enhancement of assistant principalships are listed, and recommendations for the preparation, recruitment, and selection of competent assistant principals are given. (CLA)

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nassp Council on the Assistant Principalship

Restructuring The Role of the Assistant Principal

A STATEMENT BY

NASSP's Council on the Assistant Principalship

National Association of Secondary School Principals
1904 Association Drive, Reston, Virginia 22091

NASSP's Council on the Assistant Principalship

Robert L. Buser, Professor, Southern Illinois University
Richard A. Gorton, Professor, San Diego State University
Kenneth E. McIntyre, Professor Emeritus, University of Texas
Neal C. Nickerson, Jr., Professor, University of Minnesota
Maryellen Parker, Director of Assistant Principal Services, NASSP

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National Association of Secondary School Principals
1904 Association Drive, Reston, Virginia 22091
(703) 860-0200

Executive Director: Timothy J. Dyer
Associate Executive Director, Editorial Director: Thomas Koerner
Editor: Patricia George
Technical Editor: Eugenia Cooper Potter

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Foreword

The assistant principalship is an important and dynamic resource in the continuing improvement of education for youth. The increasing emphasis on instructional leadership has caused schools to refocus their efforts on ways administrators can enhance the teaching/learning process. One vital resource to be used in this effort is the often underutilized ability of the assistant principal.

Actualization of the dynamic and personal abilities of this key actor in the educational process is necessary. No longer should the assistant principal be given responsibility only for discipline and attendance; that assignment does not use the full capabilities of the individual.

This monograph provides suggestions for educators interested in improving the educational outcome of schools, including school board members, superintendents, principals, and assistant principals themselves. It will also have value for those colleges and universities that prepare individuals for administrative roles.

Whether the assistant principalship is a preparatory position for the principalship or a career position, it must be enhanced to play a more vital role in instructional leadership.

Preface

There was a time, in the not-too-distant past, when the assistant principalship was not accorded much attention in the literature or on the job. Very little was said about the AP's job in university training programs, and almost nothing was said about it in professional books or journals. The AP was simply regarded as someone employed—if the school's enrollment justified it—to take some of the burden off the principal. That burden often consisted of handling the discipline and attendance problems.

Recently there has been a noticeable trend toward recognizing the assistant principal's important role in a school. This publication is one indication of the Council's intent to enhance the role of the AP and to provide assistance to those who hold the job.

Although it is never easy to predict the future, it is anticipated that the trend will continue. It is not unrealistic to expect that APs of the future will get more attention in the professional literature and will be less restricted to the role of disciplinarian and attendance checker. Instead, more APs will be trained to be instructional leaders and trusted to do the job. More women will hold the title of assistant principal, as indicated in the recent increase in numbers of women in preparation programs.

In this era of "empowerment," "restructuring," and "school-based management," the AP emerges as a vital participant in the enhancement of education for young men and women. All in all, the prognosis for the future of the assistant principalship is a good one.

Timothy J. Dyer
Executive Director
NASSP

The Role of the Assistant Principal

The role of the assistant principal in the day-to-day administration of the school is some combination of that which is *assigned*, *expected*, and *assumed*.

That which is *assigned* typically is expressed through job descriptions, contracts, organizational structure, directions from superiors, mentors, and personnel evaluations.

The *expected* is communicated through tradition, training programs, the media, and interactions with constituents: faculty, staff, colleagues, parents, and students.

The *assumed* portion of the role is that which the AP chooses to do to complement and expand upon the assigned and the expected. It can be creative and active. The "assumed" provides the AP with the opportunity for a more active role in the leadership of the school. Although the active role is not without risk and sometimes stress, it is indeed necessary if the AP is to emerge from the traditional organizational manager role into an instructional leadership position in the schools of the '90s.

Assigned and Expected Tasks

The value of the assistant principalship will be enhanced by:

- Active inclusion in the school administrative decision-making team.
- Shared responsibility for student discipline, attendance, and activities.
- Involvement in teacher evaluation and supervision.
- Active participation in instructional leadership.

The assistant principal should:

- Be aware of state and local policies and laws that refer to student discipline.
- Be responsible for informing students and their parents of these policies and laws.

- Be involved with other social service agencies that are concerned about chemical abuse.
- Be given assistance in enhancing student attendance responsibility.
- Share in the policy and procedural decisions relevant to student control issues.
- Become involved in activities of the school that include parents, patrons, and other citizens.
- Assist the principal in contact with parent organizations, civic groups, and other community organizations.
- Become actively involved with the site-based management council, parent advisory group, or parent-teacher board.
- Be given appropriate training and assistance if responsible for the school master schedule. This includes relevant computer training for actually building the school's schedule working with a contracted agency.
- Be involved in implementing the school's policy of teacher evaluation and supervision. The includes a role in determining which departments and/or teachers would be within the AP's area of responsibility.
- Have a voice in determining his or her responsibility with ancillary and support services in the school and district.

Assumed Roles

Assistant principals must become more active in determining their roles within the school organization. They, themselves, must come forward with suggestions about their own capabilities and interests.

The assistant principal should:

- Become active as an instructional leader, which means visiting classrooms to explore areas of possible assistance to teachers. The AP may supervise department heads in curriculum and instruction.
- Maintain instructional expertise in his or her teaching areas through continuous involvement in that subject(s) curriculum. The AP may serve on and frequently chair the school cabinet and curriculum council.
- Secure resources for teachers that will enhance their classroom performance.
- Work with the principal and administrative team, as appropriate, to enhance student learning in the building.
- Fill an active role on the administrative team. This will be identified based upon the AP's expertise and interest, together with the unique needs of the

team. It may include organizing and implementing school public relations programs and activities; and assisting in developing the school budget; assisting in planning, implementing, and evaluating the school mission and goals.

- Be considered for roles in determining his or her job description and responsibilities in the assigned tasks.

Situational Influences

The assistant principal must have more authority in determining his or her role in the school, taking into consideration the various demographic, logistical, and unique characteristics that apply to the school.

In determining the role of the assistant principal, administrators should consider:

- Size of the school
- Grades included in the school
- Specific goals and objectives of the school
- The school's mission
- The geographic location
- The size and condition of the building
- Neighborhood expectations and individuality
- School traditions
- Social, political, and legal influences that may have an impact on the school. Such factors as the presence of intermediate districts, alternative school options, and prescriptive state laws will affect the assistant principal's assignment and performance.

Relationships with Significant Others

The assistant principal may be viewed as a disciplinarian, manager, or instructional leader and probably, during an administrative career, will play all these roles at one time or another. However, regardless of what role the assistant principal is assigned or assumes, his or her effectiveness will be determined in large part by the kinds of relationships that are established with significant others, including the district office's staff, the principal of the school to which the AP is assigned, the faculty and students of that school, the parents and the larger community, and the professional organizations whose interest is in the welfare and professional development of school administrators.

In each of these relationships, both parties must develop and maintain understanding, responsiveness, and trust toward each other. The specific format these essential contributions should take is outlined below.

District Office/Assistant Principal Relationship

- The district office must recognize that the AP is not just a disciplinarian but, rather, someone who could—if given the opportunity—play a leadership role in many aspects of the overall educational program of the school.
- The district office must realize that many, if not most, APs will one day become principals. The district office should provide professional growth opportunities for assistant principals, reimbursement for participating in state and national conventions and seminars, and released time for inservice training on the local level to help APs acquire the knowledge and skills they will need later in their careers.
- Assistant principals must support and fully implement district policies and directives. When particular policies and directives are not desirable or feasible, they must take constructive action to request modification or change.
- The AP must see the district office administrators not only as superiors, but also as potential sources of assistance and support and make efforts to utilize such assistance and support.

Principal/Assistant Principal Relationship

- The principal should take a personal interest in the professional development and growth of the AP through such efforts as facilitating attendance at conferences, workshops, and conventions.
- The principal should make continuous efforts to utilize all the abilities of the AP for improving the overall educational program of the school, for example, by establishing a major role for the assistant principal on the school-based management team.
- The AP should cooperatively and fully carry out the responsibilities assigned by the principal in ways that supplement and complement the principal's effectiveness.
- The principal and the AP should form a leadership partnership in the administration of the school, recognizing the different but equally important contribution that each person makes to the success of the school.

Faculty/Assistant Principal Relationship

- The faculty must view the AP as not only a disciplinarian but someone with knowledge and abilities that could help teachers in a variety of ways.
- The AP should recognize the difficult job that classroom teachers and other members of the faculty perform, providing support and assistance wherever possible.
- The faculty must have reasonable expectations of the AP, especially in matters involving student discipline. The AP should support the faculty, especially on issues of student discipline, except when school policies and/or laws have been violated.
- The AP must respond to faculty members' requests in a helpful and timely manner. When requested, the faculty must provide the AP with accurate and complete information.

Students/Assistant Principal Relationship

- The AP must promote positive relationships with the entire student body and not just those students who are referred for their misbehavior in school.
- Students should view the AP as someone who is interested in their personal and academic development, not just a disciplinarian.
- Students should understand the often difficult circumstances under which the AP works and give support whenever possible.

- The AP's office must be perceived by students as a place of objectivity, fairness, and firmness.

Parents/Assistant Principal Relationship

- Parents must develop a good understanding of the AP's role in the school and the valuable contributions the AP makes.
- The AP must develop a good understanding of parents' expectations, strengths, and any family characteristics that could be helpful in working with their student.
- Parents must work cooperatively with the AP, especially in matters of student discipline.
- The AP must notify parents in a timely manner when a problem exists with their student and involve them in the resolution of that problem.

Professional Organizations/Assistant Principal Relationship

- Professional associations for school administrators must offer a wide variety of resources and services specifically for assistant principals.
- The AP must maintain a comprehensive knowledge of the various resources and services that the national, state, and local administrator associations can offer.
- The professional associations must facilitate AP's' involvement in leadership activities, ranging from holding office to making presentations at conventions.
- Assistant principals must take the initiative to become involved in association activities and to capitalize on the resources and services that the professional associations offer.

Organizational Structure Of the Assistant Principal's Job

It is difficult to describe the organizational structure of the assistant principal's job in the United States because of the wide variations in situations among and within the 50 states. Many small schools do not have APs at all.

Titles also vary markedly, and persons who are called assistant principals in one school district might be called vice principals, associate principals, deputy principals, or even deans in another district. Here we shall concentrate on the variations in organizational structure of the job, using the title *assistant principal* or the abbreviation, *AP*.

Assistant Principals as Generalists

When assigning APs, administrators should consider:

- Responsibility for the whole range of school functions
- Assignment by grade level
- Assignment by multiple grades
- Assignment by alphabetical student lists
- Assignment by curriculum areas
- Assignment to certain student groups, perhaps continuing with the same group through all its years in the school
- The advantage of a general assignment, which enhances the comprehensive training of an individual for the principalship
- The disadvantage of a general assignment, which may prevent the complete utilization of an individual's special skills and interests.

Staffing Ratios

Many school districts use staffing ratios to determine the number of APs that are assigned to each school. Regional accrediting associations might differ on what these ratios should be, but local school districts are usually free to set their own quotas.

Administrators should consider:

- Ratios based on the number of students enrolled
- Ratios based on the number of teachers employed
- Ratios based on the number of departments or units to be supervised.

Team Administration

Recently, the concept of team relationships among staff groups has been growing in favor. Shared decision making has come of age. Administrators should consider including the following on the administrative team:

- Teachers
- Staff personnel
- Parents
- Students
- Representatives of the community at large.

Helping Assistant Principals Improve Professionally

The assistant principal, like any other school employee, continuously needs opportunities to improve professionally. Professional improvement is necessary to increase the AP's competencies to function more effectively in the current role and to prepare for advanced administrative positions.

Some people may conceive of professional improvement as involving only attendance at workshops, conventions, or administrator academy programs. However, an enlightened view would recognize the need to focus on the evaluation, supervision, and professional development of the AP, as well as the rewards and incentives for professional improvement that are—or should be—available to him or her.

In the following sections, recommendations are presented that, if implemented, could significantly improve the performance and satisfaction of APs and increase their eventual suitability for advanced administrative positions.

Role Enhancers for Assistant Principals

- The job description for APs should include a set of role expectations that are realistic. They should offer the assistant principal opportunities to capitalize on strengths and interests and to make significant contributions to the overall educational program of the school and the school district.
- The salary schedule for APs should recognize the important and demanding work they do, and the salary schedule should be supplemented by a special merit recognition program for those APs whose performance for a particular year has been exemplary.
- The school district should provide professional growth opportunities on the local level to help APs improve their effectiveness in their current jobs

and to prepare them for advancement on the local administrative career ladder.

- The school district should set aside funds for AP's to attend state and national academies, seminars, and conventions. Not only can attendance at these meetings improve the AP's professionally, but it can increase the perception by assistant principals that the school district is really interested in developing their full potential.
- The principal should take a personal, ongoing interest in the professional development and job satisfaction of the AP. The principal can help the assistant principal perform effectively and derive job satisfaction by being sensitive to the frustrations and fatigue that APs periodically feel; by providing the AP with significant opportunities to contribute to the overall school program; by providing constructive performance evaluation; and by articulating to others the importance of the AP's job.

Evaluation of Assistant Principals

- The development of a comprehensive, reality-based, clearly written job description for the AP is an important first step in designing an evaluation program. Such a job description should be in place before attempting an evaluation.
- Each school district should establish a formal program for the evaluation of assistant principals. The primary purpose of this program should be to help the AP improve, and this purpose should be the guiding premise in the design of the program and the use of the evaluation results.
- The assistant principal, as well as the principal, should be given the opportunity to participate in the development of the various aspects of the evaluation program, including the evaluation criteria and evaluation process. They should also periodically be given the opportunity to offer suggestions for improving the program.
- The criteria or standards for evaluating an AP should be based on his or her job description and any other performance objectives jointly agreed to by the principal and the assistant principal. All evaluation criteria should be specific, clear, reality-based, and known by the AP before the school year begins.
- The process for evaluating an AP should include setting mutual goals, observing school and assessment center performance, analyzing documents (e.g., examination of a proposal on at-risk students), self-assessment, and peer assessment.

  The process might also include the collection of evaluation data on the AP's performance from students, teachers, and parents. However, these kinds of

data should be collected only if they relate directly to the AP's evaluation criteria. Caution should be exercised in the design of the collection instruments and in the interpretation of the data.

- The process for evaluating APs should include periodic progress reports, with suggestions for improvement prior to a year-end evaluation report. The AP should receive such progress reports as well as year-end reports for as long as he or she remains an employee of the school district.

Supervision of Assistant Principals

- Each principal should establish a supervisory program for the assistant principals assigned to the school. The primary purpose of this program should be to capitalize on the strengths of the APs and help them improve in areas of needed growth.
- The principal should be the primary supervisor for the APs assigned to that school. However, the principal should utilize the contributions of the central staff when relevant.
- The principal and the assistant principal should, in most cases, jointly determine the supervisory needs of the AP. This process should begin with an examination of the principal's job description and the goals, objectives, and problems of the school. Later, the process should include self-assessment by the AP, as well as direct observation and data gathering by the principal.
- Once the supervisory needs of the assistant principal have been validly diagnosed, improvement objectives for the AP must be established and supervisory assistance provided by the principal.
- Supervision of the AP should include clear specifications of the nature and extent of improvement needed; relevant, specific, clear, and helpful recommendations on how to improve; a reasonable timetable in which improvement is to occur; and professional feedback and emotional support during the improvement process.
- The specific types of supervisory approaches that should be used by a principal in working with a particular AP would depend on many factors, including the type of improvement needed. However, examples of possible approaches are presented in the next section, which deals with professional development.

Professional Development of Assistant Principals

- Every school district should establish a comprehensive professional development program for assistant principals. The main purpose of the program

should be to help the APs increase skills to perform more effectively in their current roles, as well as to prepare themselves to assume more advanced roles in the future.

- A district's professional development program for assistant principals should be developed and administered by a districtwide committee composed of representative APs, principals, and other individuals—such as teachers—whose situations are affected by the role of the assistant principal. The committee should be chaired by a central office administrator with sufficient status to command the resources necessary to implement the professional development program efficiently and effectively.
- The professional development program for assistant principals should include opportunities for APs to participate periodically in state and national institutes and conventions such as those sponsored by NASSP, as well as school district workshops.
- A wide variety of district activities should be included in the AP's professional development program, including:
  - Skill development workshops
  - Support groups and other kinds of networking
  - Professional reading and study groups
  - Interschool visits
  - Videotape analysis of performance
  - Monitoring, modeling, and mentoring
  - Assistant principal exchanges.
- The total professional development for assistant principals should be evaluated every two or three years to determine the need for improvement. The evaluation should include the perceptions of the APs about the program's effectiveness.

SECTION FIVE

The Emerging Role of the Assistant Principal

No one descriptor fits the job of the assistant principal. In fact, we see a complex mixture of generalists and specialists, assignments according to grade level and across grade levels, multi-year assignments as well as annual assignments to student groups, staffing ratios that are based primarily on school district wealth and not on discernible evidence of effectiveness, and many other confusing realities.

The news is not all bad, however. If variety is the spice of life, the assistant principal is indeed a spicy element of school administration involving APs and other school personnel. Well-trained and disciplined teams win far more games than do collections of players who are each "doing their own thing."

Although there is still a paucity of research and literature concerning the assistant principalship, the situation is improving considerably. For the first time, the job of the AP is getting serious national attention. This trend is bound to produce good results in the long run. It is hoped that publications such as this one will contribute to this trend.

Overall messages to those interested in the assistant principal position include the following.

To School Boards

- Reassess the AP role in terms of responsibilities, expectations, and reasonableness.
- Change and communicate the role to maximize on-site instructional leadership.
- Consider changing the title to "unit principal," "grade principal," or "associate principal."

To Superintendent and Central Office Administrators

- Reassess responsibilities and expectations for APs to maximize their leadership potential.
- Consider transferring APs from building to building to enable them to see the job from different perspectives.
- Use university administrative interns for training and nurturing.
- Recognize and reward the contributions of APs.

To Principals

- Nurture APs by maintaining a balance in delegating the pleasant as well as the unpleasant tasks.
- Keep the APs before the staff by giving them high-visibility functions.
- Involve APs in the staff selection, assignment, and evaluation.
- Give APs more authority and responsibility, particularly in instructional leadership.

To Teachers

- Use the AP as an instructional resource and leader.
- Consider carefully the discipline problems referred to the AP.

To Parents and Patrons

- Remember that the AP role is more than discipline, attendance, and organizational maintenance; it is instructional and programmatic.

To Assistant Principals

- Be assertive in role activities beyond the traditionally assigned and expected.
- Become involved in revising job descriptions and evaluative references.
- Demonstrate interest and competence in achieving instructional leadership responsibilities.
- Become an active partner in the empowerment process.

Getting Promising People Into the Assistant Principalship

Because fundamental change is difficult to bring about in any of us, the importance of attracting, recruiting, and selecting promising people for assistant principal (AP) preparation programs and for the job itself is beyond question. Preservice training programs, both in universities and in school districts, tend to vary considerably in effectiveness, but even the best training "cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear." We must recruit and select "trainable" people.

The job is not an easy one, which raises a question as to the motivation behind aspiring to become an assistant principal. Why not remain in teaching, which is the position previously held by most beginning APs?

Preparation Programs

An aspirant's activities should include:

- Discussions with colleagues, friends, family members, and others, as well as casual observations of what APs usually do.
- Admission to a graduate program, which can range from self-selection to a set of requirements, including teaching experience, performance on standardized tests, academic records, and recommendations.

The preparation program should include campus-based and field-based components. The campus-based training should include a combination of academic studies, discussions of cases and in-basket items, and simulations of actual practice such as role playing of employment interviews.

Field-based training should place the trainee in one or more schools for a significant amount of time to perform the tasks of an AP under the supervision of a principal and with assistance from the college or university in which the trainee is enrolled.

Recruitment of Assistant Principals

School districts should:

- Search for the best available prospects from a pool of possible candidates who hold state-level licenses or certificates.
- Recruit from outside the school district, and consider promotion from teaching positions "inside."
- Contact outside sources of nominations, such as university placement offices and individual professors, professional associations, and other reliable contacts.
- Make an active search.

Selection of Assistant Principals

School districts should:

- Screen candidates by examining licenses, certificates, transcripts, test scores, and letters of recommendation, and by making telephone reference checks.
- Continue the search if no clearly promising candidates emerge, rather than settling for a questionable choice.
- Begin final screening by using assessors who have been trained to do the job.
- Interview the candidates, using an individual interviewer, a panel interview in which several interviewers ask questions of one candidate, or a group interview in which several candidates are questioned by one or more interviewers.
- Remind interviewers to look for relevant indicators that could affect the performance of the person later in an assistant principalship.
- Consider asking the candidates to prepare material for an oral report to a group such as a school faculty, usually on a topic of the candidate's choice. Guidelines should be prepared in advance, to be used by the examiners, including such indicators as accuracy and clarity of communication, knowledge relevant to the job of the AP, and organizational skill.
- Consider using leaderless group discussions to obtain information about a group of candidates, including communication skills, language usage, knowledge, and especially leadership skills. Each observer is assigned the task of observing a small number of candidates in the discussion group—usually not more than two or three.

- Assess the candidates' written communication skills through in-basket exercises.
- Consider the use of case studies in the process.
- Use the NASSP Assessment Center process, if available, and, if possible, use assessment center reports.
- Notify the individual who is selected and instruct him or her as to next steps.
- Notify those who have not been selected and express appreciation for their interest in the position.
- Make the recommendation to the board of education, which has final selection authority.